

The Tennessee Healthy Watershed Initiative 3-Year Strategic Plan

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INTRODUCTION

With more than 60,000 miles of rivers and streams and more than 500,000 acres of lakes, Tennessee's waters provide recreational enjoyment and water supply to millions of people, and habitat that supports the most biodiverse freshwater aquatic systems in the United States. In addition, they provide the irrigation needs of agriculture as well as meeting the needs of industry. Increasingly, responding to water use demands require collaboration and thoughtful planning among a broad partnership of agencies and interests in order to assure that our waters continue to fully meet the many needs placed upon them.

The Tennessee Healthy Watershed Initiative (THWI) is a collaboration of federal, state, and nonprofit organizations committed to maintain and improve water resources in Tennessee watersheds. THWI will provide a forum for communication, collaboration, and thoughtful planning among a broad partnership of agencies and interests, and will coordinate implementation of protection and improvement efforts to protect and improve Tennessee's waters.

The THWI was launched under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) executed by The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), The Tennessee Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and West Tennessee River Basin Authority (WTRBA) in August 2011. The MOU signatories recognize that many other governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations have an interest in and a role in the health of Tennessee watersheds. The MOU and THWI Charter (Appendix 1) provide a structure that others can participate in to the extent of their interest and ability, whether that is focused on a single watershed, a region of the state, or the entire state.

The overall goals of Tennessee Healthy Watershed Initiative are the following:

- (1) Establish and nurture partnerships that lead to the implementation of critical projects to protect and improve the state of watersheds in Tennessee; and to prevent watersheds from becoming impaired and to accelerate restoration of impaired streams;
- (2) Encourage the exchange of information, coordination, and planning among agencies, citizens, and communities to achieve healthy watersheds;
- (3) Encourage the application of good science to comprehensive and collaborative strategies for healthy watershed planning; and
- (4) Focus stakeholder programs and resources toward collaborative initiatives, promoting better decisions on spending available resources, and increasing the opportunity to protect and improve multiple resources and watersheds.

The following principles will guide collective efforts and stakeholder relationships at all levels of the THWI. Together, we will:

- (1) Lead, coordinate, and innovate to produce more effective water resource outcomes.
- (2) Recognize and respect differing perspectives and build upon common interests.
- (3) Increase communication to overcome challenges.
- (4) Seek to integrate programs, resources, and capabilities to maximize benefits.

This document outlines a 3-year strategic plan for the THWI. It will define the partnership infrastructure of the initiative as well as identify and prioritize strategic program investments that demonstrate innovative efforts to protect and improve Tennessee's waters.

STATEWIDE CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Key Challenges

Environment

- Loss of riparian and floodplain habitat
- Excessive sedimentation
- Excessive nutrient loading
- Altered flow regimes

Coordination

- Universal prioritization tool or a route to share data information
- Duplication of effort where we have limited resources

Many reports ranging across the United States show the challenges that are placed upon our precious water resources. All are very similar in documenting the causes and sources of the environmental stresses or pollution that we contribute to our waters. In Tennessee, the main causes of pollution that lead to impairment of our streams, rivers, and wetlands are sediment/silt, habitat alteration, pathogens, and nutrients. Other causes of environmental stress are flow alteration, pH changes, and low dissolved oxygen as well as metals and organic pollutants.

The sources of these environmental stresses have been well documented in literature and include; incompatible agricultural activities, hydrologic modification (channelization, dams, and navigation dredging), municipal discharges, incompatible construction, industrial discharges, and incompatible mining activities.

Increasing demands on our water resources also means increasing demands on the agencies that regulate and protect our water resources. These demands in a time of level or declining resources at the agencies pose a challenge to improve our collective approach to managing Tennessee's water resources. By pooling our individual agency strengths and abilities, we intend to set a new standard for protecting our water resources.

Key Opportunities

The THWI is a unique opportunity to address the challenges listed above at a statewide, environmental and agency/stakeholder coordination scale. We will begin to set a precedent for how to achieve a better tomorrow for our water resources given the nature of the THWI partnership. We believe that the following categories represent the major opportunity areas where the THWI can address Tennessee's environmental and coordination challenges.

- Outreach and Education (to land developers and to the general public)
- Technical Assistance (to developers, and local communities)

- Collaboration among partner agencies and NGO's (stakeholders)
- Integrating water management with growing water demands
- Increasing public awareness and sustainable funding
- Developing and integrating innovative BMPs for agricultural and stormwater practices
- Providing successful demonstration landscapes

A VISION FOR HEALTHY WATERSHEDS

Collectively, the members of THWI have a broad sphere of influence on the watersheds of Tennessee. With increasing needs placed on our waters due to increasing human populations, there is a need to take a new approach to water resource management and use. This will take a new scale of leadership that the THWI seeks to achieve. Through the THWI, each member group can come together to work toward a common vision for healthy watersheds in Tennessee.

The THWI envisions "sustainable river systems throughout Tennessee in which the streams and rivers are managed to conserve the native species, natural plant communities, and ecosystems found in and along the river system while meeting the needs of human communities. Healthy watersheds in Tennessee will need to be resilient, able to adapt to changing future conditions, and will need to provide adequate and reliable water supplies for healthy communities, strong economies and interconnections between rivers and their users."

A 3 –YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

The New Scale of Leadership: All Members Come Together

In order to achieve the vision of the THWI, the members of the Initiative will think and act in new, innovative ways and participate in cooperative approaches such as those indicated below. The THWI will continue to add to these approaches as we proceed into the future. These cooperative approaches will be achievable by incorporating all members of the Tennessee community. The "standing team" will be a unique powerhouse of the THWI as it will represent multiple agencies and will be in place to move forward on new strategies. Ad-hoc teams will be developed to support the needs of the standing team. Once a year, the THWI will plan to meet with members of all committees. Periodically THWI will provide a forum for collaboration, communication, planning, and implementation for stakeholders.

Cooperative Innovative Strategies

The following are innovative strategies that the THWI will pioneer. These will be further developed and discussed as the THWI moves forward with the 3-year strategic plan.

- Development of THWI Prioritization Tool

A THWI prioritization planning tool that all THWI members utilize will achieve the vision of the THWI by enabling each member to prioritize existing sources of money, such as grants for locations of green infrastructure projects, landowner incentive programs, mitigation projects, and others. This tool will enable leveraging of funds and more strategically place funds across the state.

- Development of an Environmental Restoration Project Clearinghouse

An Environmental Restoration Project Clearinghouse will maintain a list of proposed stream and wetland restoration projects by HUC-8 watershed. This will allow for greater transparency and coordination among all restoration and mitigation projects throughout the state.

Strategic Investment Areas

The THWI Executive Committee identified in the MOU 8 strategic investment areas for the Initiative over the next three years. They are:

1. Regional Water Planning – Example: Develop long-range comprehensive plans to address water quality and supply issues focusing on watershed management units and service areas of water utilities more than political boundaries.
2. Restoration Projects – Example: Work in partnership to target and implement water resource protection/improvement projects that have the highest likelihood of success with measurable results.
3. Scientific Research and Monitoring – Example: Monitor stream conditions and conduct research to gain information needed to help communities, agencies, and industries to make better management decisions and take better care of the state's water resources.
4. Economic Development – Example: Work with key economic development partners to leverage resource and ensure future development has minimal impact on water resources.
5. Education & Empowerment – Example: Provide watershed/water resource tools and outreach material to local citizens and partners to ensure sustainability and to proactively prevent future problems by creating public awareness of practices affecting good water quality in the region.
6. Identification and Exportation of Best Practices – Example: Identify and export best management practices that are most effective and efficient in reducing pollution loads.
7. Protection of Waters and Wetlands – Example: Work with partners to target healthy waters and critical wetlands, develop action plans, and implement protection initiatives.
8. Funding – Explore ways to focus existing funding and identify/develop new sources of funding for water resource protection and improvement.

Strategic Objectives

Objective 1

Complete the partnership infrastructure for the THWI necessary for a successful long-term program by fall 2012.

Actions

1. *Establish regular meetings of Executive Committee, Technical Advisory Group, and Standing Committee*
2. *Complete 3-year strategic plan*
3. *Complete outreach strategy for engaging additional government and NGO stakeholder experts*
4. *Establish procedures for information exchange*

Objective 2

Complete execution of projects which focus on the strategic investment areas by fall 2014.

Actions

1. *Implement two introductory on the ground demonstration projects in West Tennessee & Middle Tennessee*
2. *TAG team develop and present report by August 2012 to Executive Committee on recommended Cooperative Innovative Strategies, projects and tasks that will address strategic investment areas and significant forward the purposes of the TNHWI*
3. *Revise RFP format and review procedures to ensure that the chosen strategic investment areas are clear to applicants*
4. *Coordinate grant processes of THWI partners and project management procedures*
5. *Advertise and recruit projects that have a high potential for achieving success in the strategic investment areas projects*
6. *Implement critical projects and associated success measures of each project*

Objective 3

By fall 2013, establish adequate and sustainable funding to continue the work of the THWI.

Actions

1. *Identify long term priorities and funding needs with expanded network of stakeholders*
2. *Mobilize public and private funding sources at a scale necessary to meet short term goals and augment long-term needs*
3. *Develop and implement strategic action plan for sustainable funding*

TIMELINE AND BENCHMARKS

	FY 12 (Oct 1, 2011 – Sept 30, 2012)	FY13 (Oct 1, 2012 – Sept 30, 2013)	FY14 (Oct 1, 2013 – Sept 30, 2014)
Demo Projects (RFP)	Round 1 RFP announced	Round 1 RFP closes and projects funded	Round 3 RFP projects funded
	1 st Ribbon Cutting Ceremony	Round 2 and Round 3 RFP closes Round 2 RFP projects funded	
		2 nd Ribbon Cutting Ceremony(s)	
Cooperative Innovative Strategies	1 st draft submitted to Executive Committee	Draft attachment to Strategic Plan with final results, to incorporate into funding plan	
Outreach	Plan Complete	Implementation of Plan	Implementation of Plan
	1 st Press Release	Continue Press Releases	Continue Press Releases
	Bulleted talking points complete		
Standing and Ad-hoc Teams		1 st meeting of Teams and continue meetings as needed	Continue meetings as needed
THWI Stakeholder Group		1 st annual meeting of Group	2 nd annual meeting of Group
THWI Funding Plan		Draft Strategic Action Plan for Sustainable Funding for THWI	Begin Implementation of Plan

THWI COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Presentation of the THWI to the Public

Because the THWI is a new Initiative, there is a need to build rapport with the public before the Request for Proposals (RFP) are put forward. This needs to be a consistent message among all of the signatories and should be strategically written and presented to the public in a professional manner. Each signatory will use their respective communication directors and routes to share information with the public on or before July 1st, 2012 in preparation for the release of the RFP. Talking points will also be developed such that each MOU signatory will distribute within their agency/organization. These points will also be used to be an information sheet for all potential stakeholders.

There will be a need to release information via media outlets throughout the life of the THWI, for example, before each RFP and possibly after grant awards. THWI coordinator will draft and all members of the MOU will agree on press releases before release to press.

THWI Website will be developed in a single location and updated in coordination with the THWI Coordinator. All other MOU signatories will place a link on their websites.

Outreach and Cooperative Planning

While some of the projects funded by the THWI will have various types of outreach components, the four overall goals of the Initiative cannot be achieved without meaningful outreach and relationship building by the members of the Initiative. The THWI Coordinator will draft an Outreach Plan to be reviewed and approved by the Executive Committee by Fall 2012.

The Teams below were identified in the MOU and will be utilized as a method to achieve Cooperative Innovative Strategies.

Standing and “Ad-hoc” Teams

The outreach plan will include the approach to develop both standing and ad-hoc teams with members including, but not limited to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Office of Surface Mining, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry, Soil Conservation Districts, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, local government agencies, and non-governmental organizations with an interest in watersheds.

The purpose of this standing team is to represent multiple agencies in order to assist the THWI to achieve Cooperative Innovative Strategies.

For example, the development of a prioritization tool that all agencies will use will require input from all of these members. All state agencies that have a grant or funding program would be asked to be on a Standing Team focused on this strategy. Methods to achieve this strategy might be actions taken by the Standing Team coupled with funding of a project to assist with achieving the prioritization tool.

THWI Stakeholder Group

The Stakeholder Group will consist of members of the MOU, Standing and Ad-Hoc Teams, as well as all citizens who are interested in protecting and improving water resources in Tennessee.

This group will meet once a year (dependent on availability of funding), providing a forum for collaboration, communication, planning, and implementation. Goals of the meetings will be to share information about THWI-funded projects, and gather input concerning resource needs, project ideas, and funding opportunities.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

The THWI Coordinator will lead the development of the RFP with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The Request for Proposals will be written to ensure projects are funded that meet the strategic goals of the Initiative. The Executive Committee will approve the RFP before it is communicated to the public. A “ribbon cutting” ceremony to demonstrate to the public the achievements of the THWI as well as to set examples of innovative projects to support healthy watersheds across the state of Tennessee will occur with selected projects throughout the 3-year strategic planning period. The proposed timeline for the RFP and grants is written below.

Round 1 FY 12 (Oct 1, 2011 – Sept 30, 2012)

Announce First RFP July 16, 2012

Close RFP September 15, 2012

TAG review completed by October 1, 2012

Executive committee approval by October 30

Grant Agreements executed and NEPA review completed by January 1, 2013

Projects completed no later than December 30, 2013

Round 2 (Oct 1, 2012 – Sept 30, 2013)

Announce Second RFP January 15, 2013

Close RFP March 15, 2013

TAG review completed by March April 15, 2013

Executive committee approval by May 15, 2013

Grant Agreements executed and NEPA review completed by July 15, 2013

Projects completed no later than June 30, 2014

Round 3 (Optional) (Oct 1, 2013 – Sept 30, 2014)

Announce Third and final RFP July 30, 2013 (6 month projects only)

Close RFP September 1, 2013

TAG review completed by September 30, 2013

Executive committee approval by October 30, 2013

Grant Agreements executed and NEPA review completed by January 1, 2014

Projects completed no later than June 30, 2014

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The goal for the THWI is to develop a sustainable Initiative that will continue to work in the State of Tennessee into the future. The group currently is funded to do its work until the end of FY 2014. The THWI Coordinator will lead the efforts of the TAG and Executive Committee to develop and implement a strategic plan to establish a method for continued funding for the Initiative.

CONCLUSION

The Tennessee Healthy Watershed Initiative (THWI) is a collaboration of federal, state, and nonprofit organizations committed to maintain and improve water resources in Tennessee watersheds. THWI will provide a forum for communication, collaboration, and thoughtful planning among a broad partnership of agencies and interests, and will coordinate implementation of protection and improvement efforts designed to ensure the continued health of Tennessee's waters. By implementing the 3-year strategic plan, the THWI will be uniquely positioned to work toward healthy waters throughout the state of Tennessee into the future. We will do this by providing innovative leadership and work towards achieving funding necessary for meeting the challenges facing our watersheds to achieve our vision.